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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 BOGOTA 009087

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SUBJECT: NATIONAL RECONCILIATION COMMISSION GETS UNDERWAY

REF: BOGOTA 8550

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood; reasons 1.4
(b) and (d)

Summary

11. (U) Colombia's Justice and Peace (J&P) Law, created to process demobilizing illegal armed fighters and compensate victims, directed the GOC to create an institution to manage the National Reconciliation and Reparations Fund. Vice President Francisco Santos structured the National Reconciliation and Reparations Commission (CNRR) with representatives from government and civil society to address four issues: reparations, reconciliation, institutional strengthening, and administrative support. CNRR will meet regularly over the next eight years. So far, the GOC has selected the five members from civil society: Eduardo Pizarro Leongomez, Ana Teresa Bernal Montanez, Jaime Jaramillo Panesso, Patricia Buritica Cepedes, and Nel Beltran. Two representatives from victims' groups will be selected by September 26. End summary.

12. (U) According to Article 52 of the J&P Law, the CNRR is responsible for (1) guaranteeing victims participation in the judicial process; (2) ensuring follow-up and verification of reintegration and reparations; (3) submitting a report on victims' reparation progress; (4) recommending criteria for victim compensation; (5) promoting national reconciliation; and (6) overseeing regional offices. It will operate for a period of eight years.

13. (C) A representative from the Vice President's Office estimated that the group would require at least USD 1.4 million over the next seven months for administrative costs and an additional USD 652,000 for the Reparations Fund. These are conservative figures that the GOC has already budgeted to cover CNRR expenses. The Vice President's Office is trying to attract private sector financial support for CNRR. Five main trade associations have expressed a willingness to contribute.

Who is Represented?

14. (U) Representatives from the Vice Presidency, Prosecutor General's Office (Fiscalia), Ministry of Interior and Justice, Ministry of Finance, Human Rights Ombudsman's Office, and Social Solidarity Network will form part of the Commission. In addition, President Uribe has chosen five civil society members: Eduardo Pizarro Leongomez, Jaime Jaramillo Panesso, Bishop Nel Beltran, Ana Teresa Bernal, and Patricia Buritica. He will also select two representatives from victims' groups by September 26.

Others Named to CNRR

15. (S) Eduardo Pizarro Leongomez, CNRR President:

-- Pizarro is an academic expert on conflict. He has extensively researched insurgent groups and violence in Colombia and called the conflict a "chronic insurgency." In 1987, Pizarro was one of the members of the Colombian National Commission on Violence, which published its report "Colombia, Violence and Democracy." According to Semana magazine, Uribe recently offered Pizarro the Colombian Ambassadorship to Canada.

-- Pizarro's brother Carlos was a leader of the M-19 guerrilla movement killed in 1990 after demobilizing and becoming a presidential candidate. His other brother Hernando was a leader of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) guerrillas' dissident movement "Ricardo Franco" and involved in the murder of 164 fellow members suspected of being infiltrators. He was assassinated in 1995. Eduardo Pizarro was reportedly interrogated and tortured by Army intelligence in January 1979 following the M-19's theft of weapons from an Army arsenal in Bogota.

-- Pizarro has written books and articles published domestically and abroad analyzing Colombia's conflict and democracy in the Andes. He has an undergraduate degree from the University of Paris and a postgraduate degree from the Colombian Institute for Advance Studies for Development and is working towards a doctorate from the University of Paris. He has been a visiting professor at Columbia, Princeton and Notre Dame in the United States, Tübingen University in Germany and at the University of Paris.

16. (C) Ana Teresa Bernal Montanez:

-- Bernal is the director of Colombia's National Network of Citizen Initiatives Against War (REDEPAZ), an organization advocating peaceful solutions to the national conflict for over twelve years. Bernal also directed the 1997 "Mandate for Peace," a non-binding referendum in which almost 10 million Colombians voted in favor of a ceasefire with insurgent groups, respect for human rights, and a negotiated solution to the conflict. The Pastrana Administration showcased the initiative and began talks with the FARC in 1998. Bernal won national recognition in 1997 for her role in laying the groundwork for negotiations with the ELN in Germany.

-- REDEPAZ sponsors an annual Peace Week to gather civil society and government actors together to discuss peaceful solutions to Colombia's conflict. Bernal has been an outspoken supporter of peace communities and encouraged other areas to make a commitment to peace. She has stated publicly in the past that Plan Colombia would destroy the peace process and has criticized Uribe's more militaristic approach to resolving the conflict. In her acceptance letter for the position on the CNRR commission, Bernal stressed that she would prioritize victims' rights in her work.

-- Bernal was forced to leave Colombia after receiving death threats in 1999 and spent three months in the United States. She joined a leftist movement as a teenager but decided that violence would not resolve Colombia's problems. She is the mother of two, both adults, and is 47 years old.

17. (C) Jaime Jaramillo Panesso:

-- Jaramillo is the director of the Antioquia Peace Facilitating Commission and a well-published political analyst. He has written on the peace process and advocated both the paramilitary negotiations and 2004's discussions with the ELN mediated by Mexico.

-- Jaramillo is cited on several paramilitary websites for questioning Carlos Gaviria's bid for reelection; for criticizing the ex-presidents' Ernesto Samper and Alfonso Lopez Michelsen insistence on a "humanitarian exchange"; and for warning the FARC against entering areas abandoned by the paramilitaries. Jaramillo also agreed with Uribe's assumption of emergency powers in August 2002 in response to the FARC's attack on the Casa de Narino (president's building).

18. (C) Patricia Buritica Cespedes:

-- Buritica is the Director of the Women for Peace Initiative (IMP), a Bogota-based NGO that she helped found in 2002 in response to the perception that women's concerns were not being addressed by the GOC's approach to the peace process. IMP's goal is to include women, particularly victims of the conflict, "at the negotiating table" on the issues of demobilization and peace. While IMP is generally supportive of the demobilization process, it is critical of the Peace and Justice Law for its failure to provide justice and reparations to the victims of the conflict. In particular, IMP faults the law for failure to provide to the families of person killed or "disappeared" by armed groups full accounts of what happened. IMP sponsors a project to collect testimony from women and children affected by the conflict.

-- Buritica has been a well known advocate for organized labor since she was a student. For the last 14 years, she has been a member of the National Executive Committee of Central Unitaria de Trabajadores (CUT), the largest, and politically moderate, labor federation in Colombia. She is credited with incorporating gender issues into the CUT's platform and for organizing a women's labor movement within the framework of CUT.

-- While Buritica has written articles (published on labor websites) critical of Plan Colombia and the IMF, she is a staunch advocate of strong democratic institutions as necessary for peace. Buritica is one of the group of one thousand women nominated in January for the 2005 Nobel Peace Prize. She is the mother of two children, speaks English fluently, and has visited the United States.

19. (C) Bishop Nel Beltran:

-- Beltran is the Bishop for Sucre Department and oversees all congregations in the "Montes de Maria" area of Northern Colombia. In June, one Colombian Navy commander estimated that Beltran's area had roughly 1,000 insurgents. Beltran has worked to bring international attention to the plight of displaced Colombians and paramilitary massacres that terrorized citizens for almost eight years. In 2001, Beltran wrote several editorials demanding that the Pastrana Administration either secure a peace with the FARC or take away the demilitarized "despeje." He claimed that the GOC's actions were giving the FARC an edge and weakening the government's ability to help citizens.

-- In June 2005 during a United Nations visit to the area, Bishop Nel Beltran hosted meetings with victims and NGOs in his residence. He told the delegation that the illegal armed groups had shifted from conducting massacres to carrying out individual assassinations targeted against the military or a rival terrorist group. Beltran opined that the illegal groups avoided direct clashes with rival groups and focused their aggression on the local population. In a private meeting, he told the group that AUC Commander Salvatore Mancuso had saved his life by advising him against criticizing narco trafficking in the region. Beltran said the Catholic Church was allowed to criticize illegal armed groups in general, but raising the drug trade in Sucre could prove fatal.

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